

Jesus' Response to a Group of Greek Worshipers (John 12:20-26)

At some point in the week leading up to Jesus' crucifixion a group of Greek worshipers sought an opportunity to see Jesus. This request prompted Jesus to declare that His hour had arrived, the time set in eternity for His redemptive act. He then went on to describe the nature of true spiritual commitment. Jesus calls us to follow Him, and following Him demands commitment.

Commitment to Jesus begins by seeking Him (12:20-22).

The example of the group of Greek worshipers reveals the importance of seeking Jesus as a first step of commitment. God makes Himself known to us when we seek Him with all our heart (Jeremiah 29:13).

A group of Greek worshipers approached Philip with a request to see Jesus (12:20-21).

It was the week of Passover and many Jews were pouring into Jerusalem for the feast. Among these Jewish worshipers were a number of Greeks as well, that is, Greek speaking Gentiles. Called God-fearers, these Gentiles had chosen to abandon the worship of pagan gods and instead to worship the God of Israel. Cornelius, who is described in Acts 10:1-2, would have fit this description (compare Luke 7:1-5). A group of these God-fearing Greeks, having heard about Jesus, wanted to see Him. They approached one of Jesus' disciples, Philip, with their request. The text notes that Philip was from Bethsaida in Galilee, possibly hinting that the Greek worshipers were also from that region and could easily relate to Philip even though they were Gentiles. The fact that Philip is a Greek name may indicate that this disciple was more accustomed to Gentile relationships than many of the Jews. These Greek worshipers approached Philip and said, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." Theirs was not a request prompted by mere curiosity, but an expression of hearts that wanted to know the Messiah.

Philip and Andrew together went to Jesus with the request of these Greek worshipers (12:22).

Possibly because Jew-Gentile relations were always tense, Philip decided to enlist the help of another disciple, Andrew, in this request. Andrew had a reputation for bringing people to Jesus (John 1:41-42; 6:8-9). Together, Philip and Andrew approached Jesus and told Him about this request. Greeks—Gentiles—were now seeking Jesus. Commitment begins with a heart that genuinely seeks the Lord Jesus Christ.

Commitment to Jesus involves recognizing the nature of sacrifice (12:23-24).

The request of the Greek worshipers prompted Jesus to describe commitment, beginning with the importance of recognizing the nature of sacrifice. Those who follow Jesus must, like Him, make significant sacrifices.

Jesus responded that the time had at last come for Him to be glorified (12:23).

Some have concluded that Jesus never responded to the Greek worshipers' request. However, it would make little sense for John to include this request in his Gospel unless there was some follow through. In fact, John states that Jesus "answered them," possibly referring to Philip and Andrew but also possibly referring to the Greek worshipers. It's feasible to imagine that Jesus addressed His next statements to these Greek worshipers who were standing near Philip and Andrew. Jesus' message would have then expanded to the broader audience, the surrounding crowd.

Jesus was deeply aware of the appropriate timing of His redemptive work. Prior to this Passion Week it was evident that Jesus' "hour" or "time" had not yet come (John 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). But now His time had arrived. The request by a group of Gentiles seems to have triggered the opportunity for Jesus to declare this change. After all, His death would be redemptive for both Jews and Gentiles alike. So Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." The title "Son of Man" always carried messianic meaning. To be glorified referred to Jesus' completion of His redemptive work coupled with His return to the Father's side (John 12:16; 13:31, 32; 17:1, 5). The proper time had arrived for the Messiah to die for the sins of the world.

Jesus stated that a grain of wheat had to die in order to produce more grain (12:24).

Jesus explained the nature of His glorification, His sacrifice for us. That sacrifice would set an example for His followers who would make other sacrifices for Him. "Truly, truly," Jesus emphasized, and then using an agricultural analogy of planting and harvesting described His impending death. A grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die in order to produce a harvest. Otherwise it remains a single grain. But by dying the single grain "produces much fruit." Jesus would die and be buried in a tomb. But His death would culminate in life, both His own resurrection life and eternal life for countless followers—much fruit. As Jesus would next point out, His followers would also make sacrifices. Commitment requires sacrifice.

**Commitment to Jesus demands
prioritizing our lives around Him (12:25).**

No one is truly committed to Jesus who doesn't make Him the priority of life. Too many Christians trivialize Jesus instead of prioritizing Him. Jesus takes second place at best. But Jesus deserves to be at the very core of our lives, first in all we think, say, and do.

Jesus warned that those who love their own souls will lose their souls (12:25a).

In a bold call to commitment Jesus warned against loving our own souls. By loving our souls Jesus refers to an inordinate self-love, love for our own lives and our own well being above

everything else. By making ourselves the center of attention we actually lose our souls. We fail to achieve satisfaction in this life and we forfeit eternal life (compare Matthew 10:39; Mark 8:36).

Jesus promised that those who hate their own souls will keep their souls for eternal life (12:25b).

By contrast, those who hate their own souls will actually achieve satisfaction in this life and enjoy eternal life. To hate our souls doesn't mean to hate ourselves in the sense of self deprecation or suicidal despair. Jesus simply means that we must prioritize our lives properly, making Him first and foremost in our lives. Our lives "in this world" are not to be characterized by the world's values. Instead, by setting aside the world's values and embracing the way of Jesus we can preserve our souls for eternity. Through faith in Jesus Christ we receive eternal life. Commitment to Jesus requires us to prioritize our lives around Him, to make Jesus central to our lives.

**Commitment to Jesus results in
serving and following Him (12:26).**

When Jesus is central to our lives we'll serve Him and we'll follow Him. His ways and His will become our driving purpose in life.

Jesus explained that those who serve Him must follow Him (12:26a).

To be a servant of Jesus is to follow Him. To be a follower of Jesus is to serve Him. Serving emphasizes our activity as committed Christians and can take on many forms—worshiping Jesus, sharing our faith, helping those in need. Following emphasizes our purpose as committed Christians. To follow Jesus means that we'll reflect His character and pursue His path in life. Serving and following go hand in hand.

Jesus described His servants as those who stay close to Him (12:26b).

Servants must be near their masters in order to serve them well. Committed servants of Jesus Christ will stay close to Him. Under the intense situation of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion His disciples would abandon Him. But He gathered them together again after His resurrection. In light of the resurrection they then remained close to Jesus. Jesus taught that we are to "abide" in Him (John 15:4). To stay close to Jesus includes taking time to be in His presence through the written Word, prayer, and reflection. It also includes developing a conscious recognition of Jesus' active presence in the routines of our daily life.

Jesus declared that those who serve Him will be honored by the Father (12:26c).

"If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him," Jesus promised. Serving Jesus is a mark of commitment. That commitment has its rewards. God the Father honors those who serve Jesus. That honor includes the gift of eternal life and the future rewards of heaven. However,

the Father honors Jesus' followers even in this life, through innumerable blessings and fullness of life. Our lives are infinitely better because of our commitment to Jesus Christ. Jesus calls us to follow Him, and following Him demands commitment.